

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please amend Claims 21 to 24 as follows. The claims, as pending in the subject application, read as follows:

1. (Previously Presented) A method of augmenting meta-data associated with a digital image, wherein the meta-data comprises at least one meta-data element, the method comprising:

adding a self-describing attribute tag to said at least one meta-data element, wherein each attribute tag added to a meta-data element describes a manner of retention in which the meta-data element, and a corresponding similarly identified meta-data element from another digital image are to be retained, in a case where the two images are combined, wherein the retention of the meta-data elements is dependent on the configuration of the meta-data elements.

2. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the self describing attribute tag is a tag which indicates that the manner of retention is that the meta-data elements in question should be discarded in a case where the two images are combined.

3. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the self describing attribute tag is a tag which indicates that the manner of retention is that the meta-data elements in question should both be retained individually in a case where the two images are combined.

4. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the self describing attribute tag is a tag which indicates that the manner of retention is that the meta-data elements in question should be retained as a single element in a case where values of the meta-data elements are the same, and discarded in a case where the two images are combined.

5. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein in the event the image has associated therewith a meta-data element having no self describing attribute tag, then the method further comprises the step of:

supplying a default self describing attribute tag to the meta-data element which has no self describing attribute tag.

6. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 5, wherein the default self describing attribute tag is a tag which indicates that the manner of retention is that the meta-data elements in question should be retained as a single element in a case where values of the meta-data elements are the same, and discarded in a case where the images are combined.

7. (Previously Presented) A method of augmenting meta-data associated with a digital image, wherein the meta-data comprises at least one meta-data element, the method comprising:

adding a self describing attribute tag to said at least one meta-data element, wherein each attribute tag added to a meta-data element describes a manner of retention in

which a corresponding meta-data element is to be retained in the case where the digital image is transformed, wherein the retention of the meta-data element is dependent on the configuration of the meta-data element.

8. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 7, wherein the self describing attribute tag is a tag which indicates that the manner of retention is that the meta-data elements in question should be discarded in a case where the image is transformed.

9. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 7, wherein the self describing attribute tag is a tag which indicates that the manner of retention is that the meta-data elements in question should be retained individually in a case where the image is transformed.

10. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 8, wherein in the event the image has associated therewith a meta-data element having no attribute tag, then the method further comprises the step of:

supplying a default self describing attribute tag to the meta-data element which has no attribute tag.

11. (Previously Presented) A method of combining meta-data associated with a plurality of images, wherein the images each have associated therewith meta-data comprising at least one corresponding meta-data element having associated therewith an

attribute tag which describes a manner of retention in which the corresponding meta-data element is to be retained in a case where the images are combined, the method comprising the steps of:

reading the attribute tag of each meta-data element to identify the manner of retention in which the corresponding meta-data element is to be retained; and

combining one or more similar meta-data elements associated with the images, and retaining the combined meta-data elements and one or more further meta-data elements, depending on the attribute tags corresponding to those meta-data elements.

12. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 11, wherein the attribute tag is a tag which indicates that the manner of retention is that the meta-data elements in question should be discarded in a case where the images are combined.

13. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 11, wherein the attribute tag is a tag which indicates that the manner of retention is that the meta-data elements in question should be retained individually in a case where the images are combined.

14. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 11, wherein the attribute tag[[s]] is a tag which indicates that the manner of retention is that the meta-data elements in question should be retained as a single element in a case where values of the meta-data elements are the same, and discarded in a case where the images are combined.

15. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 11, wherein in the event an image has associated therewith a meta-data element having no attribute tag, then the method further comprises the step of:

supplying a default attribute tag to the meta-data element which has no attribute tag.

16. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 15, wherein the default attribute tag is a tag which indicates that the manner of retention is that the meta-data elements in question should be retained as a single element in a case where values of the meta-data elements are the same, and discarded, in a case where the images are combined.

17. (Previously Presented) A method of retaining meta-data associated with a digital image, wherein the image has associated therewith meta-data comprising at least one meta-data element having associated therewith an attribute tag which describes a manner of retention in which the meta-data element is to be retained in a case where the image is transformed, the method comprising the steps of:

reading the attribute tag of the meta-data element to identify the manner of retention in which the meta-data element is to be retained; and

retaining the meta-data element of the image in accordance with the attribute tag corresponding to the meta-data element, wherein the retention of the meta-data element is dependent on the configuration of each meta-data element.

18. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 17, wherein the attribute tag is a tag which indicates that the manner of retention is that the meta-data elements in question should be discarded in a case where the image is transformed.

19. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 17, wherein the attribute tag is a tag which indicates that the manner of retention is that the meta-data element in question should be retained in a case where the image is transformed.

20. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 17, wherein in the event the image has associated therewith a meta-data element having no attribute tag, then the method further comprises the step of:

supplying a default attribute tag to the meta-data element which has no attribute tag.

21. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for augmenting meta-data associated with a digital image, wherein the meta-data comprises at least one meta-data element, the apparatus comprising:

means a processor for adding a self-describing attribute tag to said at least one meta-data element, wherein each attribute tag added to a meta-data element describes a manner of retention in which a meta-data element and a corresponding similarly identified meta-data element from another digital image are to be retained in a case where the two images are combined, wherein the retention of the meta-data elements is dependent on the configuration of the meta-data elements.

22. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for augmenting meta-data associated with a digital image, wherein the meta-data comprises at least one meta-data element, the apparatus comprising:

means a processor for adding a self describing attribute tag to said at least one meta-data element, wherein each attribute tag added to a meta-data element describes a manner of retention in which the meta-data element is to be retained in a case where the digital image is transformed, wherein the retention of the meta-data element is dependent on the configuration of the meta-data element.

23. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for combining meta-data associated with a plurality of images, wherein the images each have associated therewith meta-data comprising at least one corresponding meta-data element having associated therewith an attribute tag which describes a manner of retention in which the corresponding meta-data element is to be retained in a case where the images are combined, the apparatus comprising:

means for reading a reading device that reads the attribute tag of each meta-data element to identify the manner of retention in which the corresponding meta-data element is to be retained; and

means a processor for combining one or more similar meta-data elements associated with the images, and for retaining the combined meta-data elements and one or more further meta-data elements depending on the attribute tags associated with those meta-data elements.

24. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for retaining meta-data associated with a digital image, wherein the image has associated therewith meta-data comprising at least one meta-data element having associated therewith an attribute tag which describes a manner of retention in which the corresponding meta-data element is to be retained in a case where the image is transformed, the apparatus comprising:

~~means for reading a reading device that reads~~ the attribute tag of each meta-data element to identify the manner of retention in which the corresponding meta-data element is to be retained; and

~~means a processor~~ for retaining each meta-data element of the image in accordance with the attribute tag of each corresponding meta-data element, wherein the retention of each meta-data element is dependent on the configuration of each meta-data element.

25. (Previously Presented) A computer-readable medium including a computer program for augmenting meta-data associated with a digital image, wherein the meta-data comprises at least one meta-data element, the computer program comprising:

code for adding a self-describing attribute tag to at least one meta-data element, wherein each attribute tag added to a meta-data element describes a manner of retention in which the meta-data element and a corresponding similarly identified meta-data element from another digital image are to be retained in a case where the two images are combined, wherein the retention of the meta-data element is dependent on the configuration of each meta-data element.



26. (Previously Presented) A computer-readable medium including a computer program for augmenting meta-data associated with a digital image, wherein the meta-data comprises at least one meta-data element, the computer program comprising:

code for adding a self describing attribute tag to at least one meta-data element, wherein each attribute tag added to a meta-data element describes a manner of retention in which the meta-data element is to be retained in a case where the digital image is transformed, wherein the retention of the meta-data element is dependent on the configuration of the meta-data element.

27. (Previously Presented) A computer-readable medium including a computer program for combining meta-data associated with a plurality of images, wherein the images each have associated therewith meta-data comprising at least one corresponding meta-data element having associated therewith an attribute tag which describes a manner of retention in which the corresponding meta-data element is to be retained in a case where images are combined, the computer program comprising:

code for reading the attribute tag of each meta-data element to identify the manner of retention in which the corresponding meta-data element is to be retained; and

code for combining one or more similar meta-data elements associated with the images, and retaining the combined meta-data elements and one or more further meta-data elements, depending on the attribute tags associated with those meta-data elements.

28. (Previously Presented) A computer-readable medium including a computer program for retaining meta-data associated with a digital image, wherein the

image has associated therewith meta-data comprising at least one meta-data element having associated therewith an attribute tag which describes a manner of retention in which the meta-data element is to be retained in a case where the image is transformed, the computer program comprising:

code for reading the attribute tag of each meta-data element to identify the manner of retention in which the meta-data element is to be retained; and

code for retaining each meta-data element of the image in accordance with the attribute tag associated with each meta-data element, wherein the retention of each meta-data element is dependent on the configuration of each meta-data element.